THE GAMEKEEPER

Chapter 1:
“The Kestrel”

by

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Third Draft

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PAGE 1

Hi Mukesh! Glad to be working with you, my friend. I love your idea of laying this series out in "widescreen", so you can assume every panel is full-width unless otherwise stated. I'll ask you to split the occasional panel into two or three, but only if there's a solid reason. If I ever suggest a "big" panel, it just means it should have more depth on the page. And it goes without saying that if you ever have any suggestions of your own, or if there's something that doesn't work for you, just drop me a line and we can figure out how best to re-work it. This is a collaboration!

In particular, I'd be interested in hearing whether you think we should have more or fewer panels per page on average. I'm curious to see how it balances out space-wise once the captions and dialogue are added.

This first page will be a continuous movie-style "reverse zoom", pulling back from a wide landscape shot to establish the location and scene. Each panel should be slightly smaller than the last, to emphasize the "reverse zoom" effect...

1) Establishing shot of the mountain peaks of the Scottish Highlands. It's DAWN. Purple dawn-light filters across the craggy, snow-capped mountain-tops...

CAPTION
FINALLY, THE DAWN.

2) PULL BACK from the mountain-tops as they slope down into a shallow, misty valley, green and purple with wild grass and heather. Distant pine forests, and a narrow stream winding across the gentle curve of the valley floor. Wild country. This is the least populated part of the United Kingdom, with no signs of human habitation whatsoever. Breathtakingly beautiful scenery.

CAPTION
HE'S BEEN IN POSITION SINCE DUSK.
JUST WAITING.

CAPTION
WATCHING THE SKY GROW PURPLE, THEN
ROSE. FEELING THE COLD SOAK INTO
HIS BONES.

CAPTION
AT ONE WITH THE LANDSCAPE.
THE STILLNESS.

3) PULL BACK to reveal a STAG (male deer) with magnificent antlers, its head bowed to drink from the stream in the medium foreground. The stag's left-rear flank has a nasty-looking wound, crusty with dried blood, ripped open by a barbed-wire fence. The stag favors that leg slightly as if it's still sore, not putting too much weight on that hoof. Our POV is up on the near side of the valley.

CAPTION
AND THERE, WHERE HE KNEW IT WOULD BE, HIS PREY.

CAPTION
ITS FLANK STILL DARK WITH DRIED BLOOD. CAUGHT ON A BARBED WIRE FENCE, PERHAPS.

CAPTION
LEFT UNTREATED, IT WILL FESTER.

A row of three small panels:

4) Extreme close. A GLOVED THUMB flicks the rifle's safety catch to the "OFF" position...

CAPTION
NO NEED FOR FURTHER SUFFERING.

5) Extreme close. The rifle's muzzle pokes out through a spray of wild grass that conceals the hunter...

6) Extreme close. A GLOVED FINGER TIGHTENS on the rifle trigger...

PAGE 2

1) Close! The stag's head suddenly COMES UP, centered in the CROSS-HAIRS of a telescopic rifle scope. The animal is suddenly alert, ears pricked, sensing danger --

2) The stag flees, bounding off away from us as fast as it can, leaping across the heather --

CAPTION
BUT THE MOMENT PASSES.

3) Low angle, looking up from behind the hunter as he rises to his feet, exposed to the landscape for all to see now, with the bolt-action hunting rifle in one hand. No point hiding any more. He gazes up into the wide morning sky, where a KESTREL (a British bird of prey) circles far away, barely bigger than a dot on the page. He's standing on the near side of the valley, with a clear view down to the stream below. This is our first view of BROCK, the Gamekeeper, although we don't see him fully revealed yet - HIS BACK IS TO US. We want to leave him as something of a mystery for now, blending into the landscape rather than a distinct individual within in. He's wearing a dark woollen beanie cap and a grubby-looking dark green hunter's jacket, muddy jeans, and battered old hiking boots...

CAPTION
SOMETHING SPOOKED THE ANIMAL. HE READS THE LANDSCAPE, KNOWS THE SIGNS.

CAPTION
DOWN VALLEY, BARELY VISIBLE TO THE NAKED EYE, A LONE KESTREL WHEELS AND STOOPS IN THE MORNING SKY.

4) Close on the kestrel, dropping with its talons outstretched, wings spread wide --

CAPTION
TRYING TO CHASE AN INTRUDER FROM ITS TERRITORY.

CAPTION
FROM *HIS* TERRITORY.

PAGE 3

1) View from close behind Brock as he crouches to examine a patch of mud near the stream. He's down in the valley now, close to where the stag had been. The stream runs from a craggy hollow in the background, where it comes in coming over a shallow, rocky waterfall. Jumbled, mossy rocks lie tumbled down either side of the waterfall, framing the hollow. It is a secret, quiet place, hidden from the world. We still don't see Brock fully revealed - his back is to us, his head/features cut off by the panel border.

CAPTION
PERHAPS A FERAL DOG...

2) Extreme close on A HUMAN FOOTPRINT in the muddy ground at Brock's feet, the zig-zag pattern made by a modern trainer or running shoe. Clearly different from Brock's muddy work-boots.

CAPTION
... OR WORSE.

3) Small inset. EXTREME CLOSE on Brock's EYE as he SCOWLS AT US, his anger internalized. His eyes are sharp and clear.

4) Close on the rocks at the side of the hollow, which have fallen in such a way as to create a small CAVE. A grubby-looking BOY, late teens, creeps cautiously out of the cave (picture the actor DANNY DYER). His hair is matted, his clothes grimy - he's been living rough for days. Let's call him DARREN. Note that Brock is NOT visible in this panel...

CAPTION
SOON THE RAIN WILL COME - AND WHEN
IT DOES, THIS HOLLOW WILL FLOOD OUT
FASTER THAN A MAN CAN RUN.

CAPTION
ONLY A FOOL WOULD SET UP CAMP HERE.

5) Darren is suddenly SHOVED FORWARD by a hand from off-panel behind him, knocking him off-balance --

CAPTION
A FOOL... OR A *FUGITIVE*.

DARREN
AAAHH - !

PAGE 4

1) Darren SPLASHES into the pool --

2) Darren tries pathetically to clamber out of the pool, scrambling for purchase on the rocks. He looks like a drowned rat - cold, wet and pathetic. As he does so, he LOOKS UP in fear and surprise at SOMEONE above him, off-panel...

3) BIG! Low-angle upshot, from Darren’s POV. BROCK towers over us, menacing and monolithic! This is our first proper look at him, made even more intimidating by the steep perspective. He holds the rifle one-handed with the butt propped against his hip, the strap wound tight round his elbow for stability. He’s a tough, eastern-European outdoorsman. A scowling pressure-cooker of a man, bottling his anger. Scarred face, stubble cut, eyes like a timber wolf. Picture JASON STATHAM.

BROCK
THERE IS ENOUGH TRANQUILIZER IN THIS LOAD TO FELL A BULL STAG...
(link)
... AND THIS IS PRIVATE PROPERTY.

PAGE 5

1) Brock's POV. Darren slumps to the ground, dripping wet and bedraggled. He looks up at us with a pleading look - but there's a strength behind his eyes. He's a tough little nut.

DARREN
W-WAIT! DON'T SHOOT ME - !
(link)
THIS IS THE MORGAN ESTATE, ENNIT? I HEARD ABOUT THIS PLACE - THEY SAY YOU TAKE IN HOMELESS KIDS.
(link)
PLEASE MATE, I'VE BEEN WALKING FOR DAYS. HITCHED ALL THE WAY UP FROM WATFORD...
(link)
I DON'T MIND WORKING FOR IT. I JUST... I JUST NEED A PLACE TO STAY, ALRIGHT?

2) Brock stands over Darren, his rifle resting on his hip.

BROCK
A RUNAWAY, *EH?*
(link)
RUN AWAY HOME.

3) Close on Darren, head bowed. He can't meet our gaze. The weight of the world on his shoulders...

DARREN
AIN'T GOT ONE. THEY HAD ME DOWN AT THE YOUNG OFFENDERS. THE WARDERS, THEY USED TO--
(link)
NEVER MIND. DON'T MATTER.
(link)
SHOOT ME IF YOU LIKE, BUT I'M FUCKED IF I'M GOING BACK THERE.
(link)
I'M *NEVER* GOING BACK.

4) Close. Brock crouches close, giving Darren a narrow-eyed, appraising look.

BROCK
YOU ARE NOT AFRAID OF ME.

5) Reverse angle, looking past Brock to see Darren return his gaze. He's too tired to be scared.

Darren’s a tough kid who’s lived a short, hard life, and we can see it in the flat directness of his gaze.

DARREN
‘COURSE I AM.
(link)
BUT THERE’S WORSE THAN YOU OUT THERE.

PAGE 6

1) High, wide establishing shot. Some time later; the sun has risen higher in the sky. Brock and Darren are walking across rolling moors, Darren trailing slightly behind. Darren is cold and wet, hugging himself for warmth.

DARREN
SO WHAT'S WITH THAT ACCENT, THEN?
YOU RUSSIAN OR SOMETHING... ?

2) Darren leans back, intimidated as Brock gets right in the poor kid's face, grouchy and menacing, pinching his fingertips and thumb together in a gesture of emphasis and precision. Leave space for back-and-forth dialogue.

DARREN
WHAT? WHAT DID I SAY?

BROCK
CHECHEN!

DARREN
RUSSIA, CHECHNYA - SAME THING,
ENNIT... ?

BROCK
NOT THE SAME. SAY IT!

3) Darren looks cowed. Brock turns his back on him, striding away with a dismissive wave behind him.

DARREN
CHECHEN.

BROCK
GOOD! NOW NO MORE TALKING.

4) Darren trudges after him...

DARREN
BLOODY HELL, I THINK YOU'VE BEEN
OUT HERE ON YOUR OWN TOO LONG,
MATE.
(link)
WHAT ARE YOU, LIKE THE FAMILY GUARD
DOG OR SOMETHING... ?

5) Full-width panel across the foot of the page. Long shot. Brock's shoulders are set bullishly as he stalks off into the distance...

BROCK
NOT GUARD DOG...
(link)
GAMEKEEPER.

PAGE 7

1) Aerial establishing shot of the Morgan Estate - a vast, splendid Victorian mansion/shooting lodge in the heart of the Highlands. It's also a working farm, with stables, barns and service outbuildings. We can see various figures milling around in the stable yard - including one figure in a wheelchair and someone else leading a horse by the reins.

Note to letterer: "Location Captions" should be in a bold display font floating over the image, making them visually distinct from regular "narrative" captions.

LOCATION CAPTION
GLEN MORGAN ESTATE, SCOTLAND
PRESENT DAY

JONAH
AMANDA, PLEASE, WILL JUST YOU WAIT A MOMENT SO WE CAN TALK ABOUT THIS - ?

AMANDA
YOU'VE DRIVEN KRISTA AWAY FROM US AND YOU STILL REFUSE EVEN TO TELL ME WHAT IT WAS YOU ARGUED ABOUT.
(link)
WHAT MORE IS THERE TO SAY ON THE MATTER?

2) Move in closer to a two-shot of AMANDA MORGAN, a stern old lady (picture LAUREN BACALL) holding the reins of a horse; and her husband JONAH MORGAN, a gruff, wheelchair-bound academic in late middle age, wearing half-moon glasses and a tartan blanket across his lap (picture BRIAN COX).

JONAH
I DIDN'T DRIVE HER AWAY, FOR GOD'S SAKE! SHE'S NINETEEN YEARS OLD, SHE CAN MAKE UP HER OWN MIND ABOUT--

AMANDA
AND WHAT ABOUT ME, JONAH? YOU'RE WILLING TO TRUST OUR DAUGHTER WITH YOUR SECRETS BUT NOT YOUR WIFE, IS THAT IT?

3) Close on Jonah, pleading sincerely --

JONAH
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I TRUST, DARLING. YOU KNOW THAT.

YOU AND BROCK...
(link)
EVERYTHING I'VE DONE HAS BEEN TO PROTECT YOU FROM THE TRUTH.

4) Amanda swings herself up onto the horse, one foot in the stirrup. Stern-faced, looking down at us.

AMANDA
WITH AN ARMY OF ITINERANT FARM-HANDS AND DELINQUENT RUNAWAYS?
(link)
OH YES, I FEEL TERRIBLY WELL PROTECTED...

PAGE 8

1) Amanda rides out of the stable yard without looking back, away from us. She passes Brock and Darren as they walk into the yard. Brock touches his forehead as if doffing his cap - an old-fashioned gesture of respect.

BROCK
MRS. MORGAN.

2) Brock and Darren approach Jonah.

JONAH
I'M IN THE DOGHOUSE AGAIN.
(link)
WHAT HAVE YOU GOT THERE, BROCK... ?

BROCK
I CAUGHT HIM OUT IN THE GLEN.
(link)
ANOTHER ONE LOOKING FOR WORK. PERHAPS IT IS BEING THE SEASON FOR THEM.

3) Jonah gives Darren an appraising look. Darren shrugs.

JONAH
D'YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HORSES, YOUNG MAN... ?

DARREN
I'VE SEEN A LOT OF SPAGHETTI WESTERNS. THAT COUNT?

4) Darren's POV. Close on Jonah, giving us a stern look. Eye contact.

JONAH
WELL YOU CAN START LEARNING NOW.
(link)
MY NAME IS JONAH MORGAN - MY WIFE AND I OWN THIS ESTATE.
(link)
WE DON'T CARE WHERE YOU COME FROM OR HOW YOU ENDED UP HERE. THE PAST IS THE PAST. PLAY FAIR BY US AND YOU'LL BE TREATED WELL. BETRAY THAT TRUST, AND YOU'LL END UP BACK WHERE YOU STARTED BEFORE YOUR HEAD'S STOPPED SPINNING.
(link)
FAIR ENOUGH?

5) Darren grins.

DARREN
FAIR ENOUGH. AND...
(link)
THANKS.

PAGE 9

1) Jonah calls out to SETH, a rough-looking farmhand who approaches them.

JONAH
SETH! PUT HIM TO WORK IN THE STABLES. HE CAN BED DOWN IN THE HAY LOFT UNTIL HE CAN BE QUARTERED.

SETH
RIGHT YOU ARE, SIR.
(link)
THIS WAY, LAD.

2) Brock and Jonah confer in the foreground, watching as Darren follows Seth off towards the stables in the background. Brock looks troubled.

BROCK
HE SCARED OFF THE BULL STAG BEFORE I COULD TREAT ITS WOUND. I SHOULD HAVE RUN HIM OFF.

JONAH
NO, NO, WE NEED ALL THE HANDS WE CAN GET AROUND HERE. ESPECIALLY SINCE, YOU KNOW...
(link)
SINCE KRISTA WENT AWAY.

3) Two-shot of Brock and Jonah. Jonah look up at him, but Brock seems lost in a distant sadness...

JONAH
BESIDES, EVERYONE DESERVES A SECOND CHANCE, DON'T THEY?
(link)
BROCK... ?

4) Move in close on Brock, not answering, lost in memory, his eyes hollow and grieving...

5) Brock's POV, looking at Darren, who turns to look back at us over his shoulder with a grateful smile.

CAPTION
"THERE ARE NO SECOND CHANCES..."

PAGE 10

1) FLASHBACK. THE COMPOSITION OF THIS PANEL SHOULD MIRROR THAT OF THE PREVIOUS PANEL AS CLOSELY AS POSSIBLE (i.e. Page 9, panel 4). It's a "mirroring" effect we'll use to slide into flashbacks smoothly.

Mukesh, the art and coloring style for all flashback sequences needs to be clearly distinct from the "present day" sequences - perhaps just penciled without inks, and/or with ragged panel borders, and/or with faded, washed-out coloring. Whatever works for you - as long as it works! Every subsequent flashback in the opening 5-issue arc will be a continuation of the scene we're establishing here.

We've jumped back 10 years into the past, to the cold Caucasus Mountain pine forests of southern Chechnya. As previous, this panel is composed from Brock's POV. His 10-year old son DESAN is up ahead, mirroring the position of Darren in the previous panel. Desan stands with his back to us, looking back over his shoulder at us with the same expression. He's wielding a single-shot, bolt-action hunting rifle with a telescopic scope. Desan is a serious-minded boy with a tough, flinty strength behind his eyes. Picture the actor LUCAS BLACK, who appeared in AMERICAN GOTHIC and SLING BLADE as a young boy, and then a decade later in FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS and FAST AND THE FURIOUS: TOKYO DRIFT in his early 20s...

DESAN
SURE THERE ARE!
(link)
SO WHAT IF I MISS - I CAN ALWAYS
TAKE ANOTHER SHOT AT IT.

2) Desan's POV, looking back at BROCK - 10 years and a lifetime younger. He still has some of his hair; but more significantly, he has not yet been ground down by the burden of horrors that await him. He is a rough, earthy father, honest and happy, with a face that cracks easily into a smile. Teaching his son to hunt with a rifle - in this part of the world, as natural and wholesome as a game of catch in the back yard. He is every boy's memory of their father; smiling patiently, lovingly.

BROCK
IF YOU MISS - OR JUST WOUND IT -
THE BUCK WILL VANISH FASTER THAN
THE BLINK OF AN EYE.
(link)
YOU'LL WASTE HALF A DAY TRYING TO
TRACK IT DOWN AGAIN, AND IT IT'LL
BE ALL THE MORE WARY WHEN YOU DO.

3) Two-shot. Desan hands Brock the rifle.

BROCK
NO, THERE'S A GOOD REASON A HUNTING RIFLE ONLY HOLDS ONE BULLET. YOU *WAIT* FOR YOUR SHOT.
(link)
PATIENCE IS THE HUNTER'S WEAPON.

DESAN
THAT'S WHAT YOU ALWAYS SAY - AND EVERYTHING TAKES TEN TIMES LONGER!

4) Closer on Brock. He racks the rifle bolt, ejecting an unspent .303 cartridge. His smile is fading, grim bitterness settling over him like a rain cloud...

BROCK
THIS IS OUR *LIFE* NOW, DESAN. WE DON'T KILL, WE DON'T EAT.
(link)
THE NATURE OF THE MOUNTAINS IS NOT TO FORGIVE.

5) Close on Desan, sulking now, his smile evaporated. A shadow has been cast on both of their hearts...

DESAN
THEN WE SHOULD GO BACK TO THE CITY.

PAGE 11

1) Brock turns away from his son, grief hollowing his eyes. Haunted by bitter memory. He doesn't want his son to see the emotion on his face - but we do. We will leave the reader to imagine what might have happened to the boy's mother...

BROCK
SOMETIMES, DESAN, YOU SOUND SO MUCH LIKE YOUR MOTHER IT KILLS ME.

2) View from behind the two of them as they move forward through the deep forest. Desan in foreground panel left, Brock in mid-ground panel right, a few yards ahead of Desan. Brock suddenly crouches, intense and dynamic, waving one hand down and behind to signal Desan to hit the dirt. We can see that the ground suddenly drops away up ahead, but we can't see what lies beyond --

DESAN
GOD REST HER--

BROCK
GET DOWN!

3) Very low angle, POV from below the lip of the drop-off in front of them. Both of them lie in the pine-needle dirt, peering down over the edge of a low cliff. Desan is confused; Brock is utterly alert and intense, his eyes boring down into us like diamond drills --

DESAN
WHAT IS IT, DAD? I CAN SMELL BURNING--

BROCK
SHH!

4) BIG. SAME ANGLE. PULL BACK to reveal a shallow cliff-face, dropping away to a hollow in the forest. Some kind of rooftop in the foreground. Black smoke rising from it, although we can't yet tell if it's from a chimney or something else...

PAGE 12

1) BIG! Almost a full-page splash. Pull back from previous to reveal a wide establishing shot of the scene. A wooden hunting lodge/log cabin sits in a hollow in the forest, surrounded to the rear by low cliffs rising to about 30 feet at the highest point. Brock and Desan lie at the lip of the cliff, tiny in the panel. The lodge itself is on fire, flames roaring from the blown-out windows, thick black-and-orange smoke boiling from the roof. SIX MEN stand in the clearing around the lodge, watching it burn. They are Russian FSB (Secret Service) agents, dressed in civilian clothes but carrying snub-nosed Kalashnikov AKS-74U assault rifles. One of the six Russians stands forward of the others, standing over a seventh man who kneels before him. Although we're probably too far away to see what's happening in detail, the kneeling man is being tortured...

2) Full-width panel across the foot of the page. Move in closer on the torture scene. SADIC is a brutal and ruthless FSB officer. DRAGANOV is the man being tortured - a thin, elderly academic. Sadic has twisted one of Draganov's hands behind his back, and is cutting off one of his fingers with a combat knife. Draganov SCREAMS, helpless. The other FSB agents just stand and watch, stony-faced...

CAPTION

TEN YEARS AND A LIFETIME LATER,
HE CAN STILL SMELL THE SMOKE.

3) Small inset panel. Extreme close on Draganov - his eyes squeezed shut, SCREAMING in agony...

CAPTION

HEAR THE SCREAMING.

PAGE 13

1) BACK TO THE PRESENT. It’s NIGHT. BROCK suddenly bolts upright in bed, staring right at us, alert and intense in the semi-darkness --

CAPTION
SENSE MEMORY.

CAPTION
THE HORSES --

2) Brock shoves open the door of the rough wooden shack on the estate grounds - his humble home. He’s pulling on a jacket --

CAPTION
THE HORSES ARE SCREAMING.

3) BIG! The Morgans’ stables are ON FIRE! A dozen farm-hands try to fight the flames with water buckets and blankets, but it’s out of control. In the foreground, SETH the stable-hand YELLS --

SETH
(jagged)
FIRE! THE STABLES ARE ON FIRE!
(link)
EVERYBODY UP!

4) View looking out through the stable doors as farm-hands are forced back by the intense heat. Flames in the foreground.

PAGE 14

1) DARREN scurries away from the burning stable towards one of the outbuildings. It's dark out here, and he's little more than a silhouette. He speaks into a mobile phone. He looks worried, sick with guilt at what he's done...

RADIO JAG
(no tail)
IS IT DONE... ?

DARREN
AND DUSTED - STABLE'S GONE UP LIKE GUY FAWKES NIGHT. THE HORSES, THOUGH, THEY'RE STILL IN THERE...
(link)
CHRIST, I NEVER KNEW THEY COULD MAKE A SOUND LIKE THAT.

2) Darren ducks back behind the outbuilding, hidden from view of the stables.

RADIO JAG
(no tail)
FOCUS, DARREN. EMERGENCY SERVICES - WHAT'S THEIR E.T.A.?

DARREN
THEY MUST BE AN HOUR OFF EASY, IT'S THE ARSE END OF NOWHERE OUT HERE.

RADIO JAG
(no tail)
AND THE MAIN HOUSE... ?

3) Darren peeks out from behind the outbuilding, his face semi-lit by the firelight from the burning stables in the distance.

DARREN
BURGLAR ALARMS HAVE ALL GONE DOOLALLY, AND EVERYONE'S OUTSIDE FIGHTING THE FIRE.
(link)
IN OTHER WORDS, IT'S WIDE OPEN.

RADIO JAG
(no tail)
GOOD WORK.
(link)
ALRIGHT, MEET US AT THE RENDEZVOUS POINT...

4) BIG! Low angle upshot for dramatic impact. Deep in the dark woods elsewhere on the estate grounds, TWO MERCENARIES are readying their weapons - compact Heckler & Koch G36C assault rifles with fat cylindrical silencers/suppressors, laser-spot designators, entry flashlights and night-vision scopes. Serious hardware. The two men are professional British mercenaries, dressed in dark civilian clothing and black kevlar vests, their faces smudged with dark camo paint. Both wear radio mike/earpiece headsets and black woolen beanie hats which, we will later discover, can be rolled down into SWAT-style face-covering balaclavas. These two men are Alpha team - let's call them Alpha 1 and Alpha 2. We'll be meeting Bravo and Charlie teams later...

ALPHA 1

IT'S TIME.

PAGE 15

1) DARREN runs from behind the outbuilding, away from the stables and house, heading for the deep blackness of the woods beyond...

2) BROCK lurks in the shadow of a tree, crouched, alert as a predatory animal, his eyes narrowing suspiciously - he's spotted Darren...

3) Darren approaches the lone Alpha 1 merc in a shadowy woodland clearing...

DARREN
ALRIGHT, I'VE TORCHED IT JUST LIKE YOU SAID. NOW WHEN DO I GET ME MONEY... ?

ALPHA 1
RELAX, SUNSHINE. YOU'LL GET WHAT'S COMING TO YOU.

4) Close on Darren as the second merc, Alpha 2, suddenly pulls a GARROTTE around his throat! Darren's eyes bulge with terror as the wire bites into the skin of his throat. We can see Alpha 2 intimately close behind the boy, straining to choke the life out of him...

ALPHA 2
PAYMENT IN FULL.

PAGE 16

1) Low angle establishing shot of the big old Morgan house, lit by the flames of the nearby stable. Most of the lights are on, doors standing open, farm workers running out to fight the fire...

JONAH
(from house)
FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, AMANDA, WILL YOU GET YOURSELF OUTSIDE! THE FIRE COULD EASILY SPREAD TO THE HOUSE...

2) Interior establishing shot. The bedroom of JONAH and Amanda Morgan. Jonah points to the bed as Amanda fusses around him. A large, black, heavy iron SAFE with an old-fashioned combination wheel sits next to his side of the bed, doubling as a bedside table for his lamp, clock etc.

AMANDA
JONAH, PLEASE, WE NEED TO GET YOU OUT TOO - !

JONAH
I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU, I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE.
(link)
PASS ME THE PURDEY, WOULD YOU? UNDER THE BED.

3) Amanda hands us a lacquered walnut carry-case...

AMANDA
THIS IS SOMETHING TO DO WITH CHECHNYA, ISN'T IT? WITH WHATEVER'S IN THAT BLOODY SAFE OF YOURS.
(link)
I'M GOING TO FIND BROCK. MAYBE *HE* CAN TALK SOME SENSE INTO YOU...

4) Jonah sits with the open case on his lap, assembling a beautiful James Purdey & Sons side-by-side 12-gauge shotgun. Inlaid with ornate scrollwork, with a polished buttstock of Turkish walnut. A real collector's piece.

JONAH
LOOK, IF IT'S JUST A FIRE, THE BOYS WILL HAVE ENOUGH ON THEIR HANDS WITHOUT HAVING TO LUG ME DOWN THE STAIRS.
(link)
AND IF THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT, WELL...

5) Jonah snaps the assembled shotgun shut, nailing us with a grim scowl...

JONAH
SOMEBODY NEEDS TO STAND GUARD.

PAGE 17

1) Low angle, worm's eve view of Alpha 1. He looms over us, speaking into his radio headset as he looks down at Darren's dead body lying glassy-eyed in the extreme foreground. Alpha 2 - the guy who garrotted the kid - is not visible in the panel. Leave plenty of room for back-and-forth dialogue here.

ALPHA 1
AMATEUR.
(link)
BRAVO TEAM, SIT REP.

RADIO JAG
(no tail)
REAR PERIMETER'S SECURE.

ALPHA 1
CHARLIE?

RADIO JAG
(no tail)
STANDING BY. READY TO GO IN.

ALPHA 1
ROGER THAT. GO FOR IT.
(link)
TAKE THE PRIMARY ALIVE IF YOU CAN.
EVERYONE ELSE IS COLLATERAL.

2) View from behind Alpha 1 as he begins to turn towards us. It's time to get moving.

RADIO JAG
(no tail)
ROGER THAT, ALPHA.

ALPHA 1
ALRIGHT GARRETT, IT'S GAME TIME.
(link)
GARRETT... ?

3) BIG! Alpha 1's POV. His partner Alpha 2 ("Garrett") is DEAD - the garrotte around his neck tying him to the trunk of a tree, his feet dangling several inches above the ground - !

4) Extreme close on Alpha 1, already wide-eyed with horrified surprise, as he is suddenly GRABBED from behind by a GLOVED HAND ACROSS HIS MOUTH --

ALPHA 1
MMNG - !

PAGE 18

1) Intimately close. BROCK grips Alpha 1 from behind, whispering close in his ear as he holds a hunting knife to the merc's exposed throat. Brock's other hand rises from the merc's mouth to allow him to speak.

BROCK
IN THE HOUSE. HOW MANY?

ALPHA 1
TH-THREE--

2) Without hesitation, Brock CUTS THE MERC'S THROAT with a single swift, brutal stroke. Alpha 1's eyes bug wide with utter horror as his jugular opens up, blood spraying in a red fan --

ALPHA 1
HHKK

3) Low angle. Alpha 1 lies dead and bloody on the ground, wide-eyed. Brock's gloved hand reaches down from off-panel to pick up the merc's fallen assault rifle.

RADIO JAG
(no tail)
ALPHA TEAM, WE'RE IN.
(link)
ALPHA, YOU COPY... ?

4) Brock hurries away from us, towards the house, a stealthy silhouette...

PAGE 19

1) Three more mercenaries - CHARLIE TEAM - move in through the open back door of the Morgan house, into the large kitchen. Weapons held ready. Each has an M84 stun grenade hanging on his combat webbing. Their faces are covered by black balaclava face-masks...

2) They creep stealthily up the wide staircases towards us, weapons ready. The third man watches their rear. They're professionals...

3) Over-the-shoulder shot as they advance down a shadowy corridor. Light spills from an open bedroom doorway up ahead. The lead merc, CHARLIE 1, silently gestures towards it with his left hand, weapon aimed with his right...

4) Close. View from inside the bedroom as Charlie 1 peeks around the door-frame...

5) Charlie 1 DUCKS BACK as the door-frame next to where his head had been suddenly EXPLODES in a shower of splinters - blasted by a shotgun - !

CHARLIE 1

SHIT - !

PAGE 20

1) JONAH sits in his wheelchair in the bedroom, in front of the black iron safe, aiming the Purdey shotgun at us, grim. Smoke rises from one of the two barrels. A box of shotgun shells sits on his lap.

JONAH
YOU LIKE THAT? I'VE GOT ANOTHER ONE JUST LIKE IT RIGHT HERE.
(link)
THE POLICE ARE ON THEIR WAY. IF I WERE YOU I'D GET OUT NOW WHILE YOU STILL CAN.

2) Jonah's POV. An M84 STUN GRENADE suddenly bounces onto the bedroom carpet in front of him - presumably tossed in from the doorway. The pull-ring and safety lever are gone - it's live!

3) Small, extreme close inset. Jonah's reaction - horrified surprise!

4) Jonah throws his weight sideways, toppling the wheelchair over away from the grenade --

5) BANG! Everything WHITES OUT as the grenade explodes, throwing the room into ultra-high-contrast black-and-white --

PAGE 21

1) Floor-level shot. Badly stunned, his ears bleeding, Jonah reaches for the shotgun lying in the extreme foreground - but Charlie 1’s BOOT steps down on his hand --

JONAH
N-- NNUUUH...

2) Jonah’s POV, looking up at Charlie 1 towering over us with his assault rifle aimed right at us, massively foreshortened by the steep perspective.

CHARLIE 1
I’LL HAVE YOU FOR THAT, YOU CUNT.
(link)
SAFE. OPEN IT. NOW.

3) Extreme close. Jonah turns the safe’s combination-wheel with trembling fingers, with Charlie 1’s gun aimed at the back of his head...

JONAH
A-ALRIGHT... P-PLEASE...

4) Jonah lies slumped back against the wall, next to the now-open safe. Charlie 1 takes a large brown paper envelope from the safe. If we’re close enough, we might be able to read the word DRAGANOV on the envelope...

CHARLIE 1
SWEET.
(link)
ALRIGHT, GRAMPA - ANY FAMOUS LAST WORDS?

5) Extreme close. Jonah closes his eyes, snarls through his teeth, pained but defiant --

JONAH
GO--
(link)
GO TO... HELL...

6) Charlie 1 FIRES at us, point blank --

CHARLIE 1
AFTER YOU.

PAGE 22

1) The three members of Charlie team walk out of the bedroom into the shadowy corridor. They look casual and relaxed, thinking they're out of danger...

CHARLIE 2
ALL SEEMS A BIT MUCH IF YOU ASK ME.
(link)
LOT OF HARDWARE JUST FOR SOME OLD BLOKE IN A WHEELCHAIR.

CHARLIE 1
PAYS TO BE PREPARED, THOUGH, DUNNIT? AFTER ALL...

2) BIG! Almost a full-page splash. Pull back down the corridor to reveal BROCK standing in the shadows around the corner, out of view of the mercs, waiting for them. He stares at the reader with cold murder in his eyes. The stolen assault rifle gripped in one hand, the combat knife in the other - ready to swing it round the corner to impale whichever unwitting merc reaches him first...

CHARLIE 1
YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT MIGHT BE ROUND THE NEXT CORNER.

[TO BE CONTINUED!]